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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: AS HIS CASE DRAGS ON, SHOHAIB CHOUDHURY REMAINS A
QUIXOTIC CHARACTER

REF: 08 DHAKA 882 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY
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¶1. (C) Bangladeshi journalist Salah Uddin Shohaib Choudhury) on trial for sedition, treason and blasphemy) related to his advocacy of ties between Bangladesh and Israel) appeared in court on February 19. The hearing was brief as the prosecution's witness, a police officer, was unable to attend. The judge postponed the case until March 31. In the meantime, the trial almost remains a sideshow as Choudhury continues to dabble with the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP), the political arm of the banned terrorist group Harkatul Jihad al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B). Choudhury was also a victim of a minor assault stemming from a landlord-tenant dispute.

TRIAL DRAGS ON
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¶2. (C) The criminal trial resumed on August 6, 2008 after the defense made several unsuccessful attempts over the summer to have the case dropped for lack of evidence. Since then, hearings have been sporadic. In a recent meeting with PolOff, Choudhury was unclear when his trial would end but expressed hope that the new Awami League (AL) government would resolve it in his favor. (Note: Arrested in 2003 Choudhury faces a number of charges filed in 2004. End note.) He added that the AL was less tied to the Islamists.8

TIES TO ISLAMISTS?
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¶3. (C) Choudhury has spoken out very strongly against the threat of militant Islam in Bangladesh and projects himself as a voice for tolerance and closer ties with Israel and the West. However, he also has close contact with the IDP as part of an ongoing dialogue to bring them into the mainstream.8 He admitted he had met with IDP leaders several times and that he was a guest at the party's official launch in September 2008. According to Choudhury, Dr. Richard Benkin, an American citizen, had also been in contact with the IDP and supported his efforts at promoting interfaith understanding.8 Choudhury said that it would be much better for the IDP to become an open political party rather than remaining an underground group. He added that the IDP had never spoken out against the U.S. and had officially demanded that the Government of Bangladesh's travel ban on Israel be rescinded.

SHOHAIB AS A VICTIM
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¶4. (C) According to Choudhury, he suffered minor injuries after being attacked on February 22 at his newspaper offices by a group of 30-40 armed men. Choudhury alleges that his landlord and the attackers were connected to the ruling AL and that one of the individuals was a member of the DGFI (Directorate General of Forces Intelligence, military intelligence). Though some accounts suggest otherwise, his own recounting of the incident indicated that it was the result of a dispute with his landlord over office space rather than a politically motivated act. Police records, which include Shohaib,s statement, do not mention his allegation of a connection with the AL. The records also state that his landlord was seeking to collect overdue rent.

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) Like many others in Bangladesh,s overstretched judicial system, Shohaib Choudhury,s court case will likely continue on for an unforeseen period. Local interest in the case has largely died down. Choudhury will likely continue to make news out of court, however, and his connections to the IDP raise questions about his ultimate motivations. Despite Chowdhury,s assertion, Post has strong reasons to believe that the IDP acts as a foil for terrorist groups. Post will continue to monitor the case closely and continue to urge the Government of Bangladesh to respect international standards of justice and human rights.

MORIARTY